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EASTERN EUROPEAN INTELLIGENCER

OCI #0715/68

9 May 1968

Poles Push Propaganda Attack on Czechoslovakia

Polish propaganda against recent developments in Czechoslovakia, mounting since 4 May, apparently escalated further with a 9 May demand in the main party daily that the "alien, anti-Socialist trend" in Czechoslovakia be "forcibly silenced by our Czechoslovak comrades."

This attack, the most violent so far, follows yesterday's meeting of four Eastern European party leaders in Moscow on the Czechoslovak question, and coincides with reported rumors in Warsaw that Soviet troops are moving into Czechoslovakia. On the evening of 8 May the Austrian ambassador in Warsaw said that he had heard reports of "troop movements on the Czechoslovak border." None of these reports and rumors have yet been confirmed.

On 8 May the Polish leadership sent a congratulatory telegram to Czech leaders on the occasion of the country's liberation celebrated on 9 May. The message pointedly reminded the Czechs of both countries' "obligation" to strengthen the Warsaw Pact, the need for both bilateral cooperation within the framework of CEMA, their debt of gratitude to the USSR, and stressed the import of their own bilateral alliance.

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Hungary Lauds Czechoslovak Reforms

While the Polish party press mounted its fiercest attack yet on the trends in Czechoslovakia (see preceding item), the Hungarian "Peoples Front" paper Magyar Nemzet heaped praise on Prague's movement toward democratization.

The Hungarian daily stated flatly that "there is not a single point in the Czechoslovak party's action program which any other Communist country could not underwrite," and that this means freedom of the press, judicial reform, a secret ballot, and a chance to leave the country. The paper added that Czechoslovak communism is seeking "specific forms best suited to its traditions," which include a "democratic public spirit ...created in the years between the wars."

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Although the Magyar Nemzet article is somewhat out of line with previous friendly but cautious Hungarian comment on Czechoslovakia, its timing may be significant. It follows party boss Kadar's participation in the 8 May party leaders' meeting in Moscow on the Czechoslovak problem, and suggests that unanimity was not the order of the day even among those considered Moscow's most reliable allies.

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Tito's "Unpleasant" Visit to Moscow

Tito's talks with Soviet leaders in Moscow on 28-30 April further underlined Tito's differences with the Soviets on key international and domestic issues.

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[redacted] the greatest differences emerged over Yugoslavia's continued refusal to attend the November world communist conference and the course of reforms in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Tito also reportedly refused a Soviet request to proselytize among the non-aligned nations for the NPT.

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[redacted] the Soviets criticized the Yugoslav economic reform, citing the current stagnation in the Yugoslav economy as proof of the reform's failure.

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[redacted] Although the Soviet criticism may not have actually been so blunt, even implied criticism would have raised Tito's hackles.

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The Yugoslavs have always disliked Brezhnev, whom they regard as too crude.

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[redacted] The Yugoslavs apparently prefer to deal with Kosygin, whom they believe perhaps exaggeratedly, is more liberal.

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Austro-Hungarian Border Incident

Two Hungarian refugees smashed a truck through Hungarian border fortifications late on 6 May. Hungarian guards fired across the border, wounding both men, and dragging one back into Hungary from about 150 feet within Austrian territory where the truck was halted.

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Chancellor Klaus, reportedly is irritated that the mood of accommodation with Hungary which resulted from his visit to Budapest a year ago has now been "destroyed." At that time, Hungarian party boss Kadar told Klaus that Hungary was making its border with Austria more "civilized."

The press uproar in Austria over the incident will put a crimp in the recently rising influx of Austrian tourists into Hungary, at the very least, and probably cool off mutual relations. The Austrians reportedly have decided to hold up a formal invitation, scheduled to be delivered this week, for Hungarian Premier Fock's visit to Austria this September.

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Former Czechoslovak Interior Minister Released from Prison

Ex-Minister of Interior Rudolf Barak, who was tried in 1962 on trumped up charges of "economic crimes," has been released from prison, according to an official announcement by the Prosecutor General on 8 May.

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Barak was widely believed to have been imprisoned because of his then premature moves toward rehabilitation of the victims of Stalin-era purges. These moves by Barak were probably related to the budding opposition within the party to conservative party boss Novotny. Barak was rumored as the moving force behind much of this opposition. His release coincides with mounting friction between Prague and Moscow over the latter's complicity in the Stalinist purges in Czechoslovakia. If Barak tells what he knows, the issue may become even more volatile.

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Czechoslovak Political Amnesty Announced

President Svoboda announced a wideranging political amnesty on 9 May, presumably for the occasion of Czechoslovakia's Liberation Day.

The amnesty "fully or partially remits" all penalties for "crimes against the republic, for offenses endangering the official secrets act, violence against individuals or groups, and for spreading of alarming rumors." Those imprisoned for leaving or aiding in the illegal departure from the country are also affected by the amnesty, providing their acts were committed after 1 January 1956.

This is the Dubcek regime's first announced amnesty, although many political prisoners apparently have already been released since February without fanfare. The release of former Interior Minister Barak (see preceding item) presumably stems from his amnesty.

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Drought Threatens Balkan Economies

The Albanian Ministry of Agriculture has issued a list of ten measures to combat drought effects, including the rationing of water and increased irrigation. In Bulgaria, a national conference on the problem was addressed on 7 May by Premier Zhivkov who admitted that the drought has already inflicted damage on the national economy. Yugoslav peasants reportedly have been caught short of fodder and are selling their live-stock herds at panic prices. Official estimates of the 1968 Yugoslav crop have been reduced by twenty percent according to the US Embassy in Belgrade.

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